



Together. For Oregon's Land.

March 18, 2019

*Testimony in support of SB 5539 and SB 5540: Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board*

Ways and Means Sub-Committee on Natural Resources

Blue Mountains Conservancy  
Blue Mountain Land Trust  
Columbia Land Trust  
Center for Natural Lands Management  
Deschutes Land Trust  
Friends of the Columbia Gorge Land Trust  
Greenbelt Land Trust  
Klamath Lake Land Trust  
Lower Nehalem Community Trust  
McKenzie River Trust  
North Coast Land Conservancy  
Oregon Rangeland Trust  
Pacific Forest Trust  
Southern Oregon Land Conservancy  
The Conservation Fund  
The Nature Conservancy  
The Wetlands Conservancy  
The Trust for Public Land  
Wallowa Land Trust  
Wild Rivers Land Trust

The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) is the central voice for 21 land trusts in Oregon. Our mission is to serve and strengthen the land trust community of Oregon. The work of COLT and our members ensures that Oregon's natural systems, watersheds and recreational lands are protected for future generations. Together, COLT's members own and manage over 450,000 acres in Oregon.

The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts is writing **in strong support of SB 5539, SB 5540** and the recommended **policy package 110** to fund the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) operations and grant programs.

The members of COLT and OWEB share a common purpose to protect and restore habitat in a manner consistent with community needs and local economies. Land trusts are part of a robust network of local conservation organizations that partner with landowners to restore riparian areas, improve water quality and monitor ecological outcomes over time. Land trusts leverage OWEB funding with private and federal funding sources to ensure that OWEB's investments are benefiting Oregonians in perpetuity.

OWEB's grant program is unique in the nation because it invests in **local organizations** to support voluntary conservation. COLT members have partnered with OWEB to protect and restore large stretches of the Willamette River, turning former gravel mines into thriving habitat corridors. Our members have conserved some of the last estuary habitat on the North Coast that supports our returning salmon populations. In eastern Oregon, land trusts partner with land owners to protect sage grouse habitat on ranch lands. These projects are successful because they leverage the scientific expertise within OWEB with regional partnerships.

This year OWEB celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, providing a chance to reflect on two decades of investments in watershed health. The investments have resulted in over:

- **5,000 stream miles restored;**
- **1 million acres of upland habitat restored; and**
- **50,000 acres of wetland or estuarine habitat created.**

Through OWEB's investments we've seen huge conservation victories like the delisting of the Oregon chub in 2014.

As we look ahead to the next twenty years, OWEB's diverse grant programs are more important than ever in addressing the impacts of **climate change**. With continued investments in water quality and wetland health, forest restoration and the protection of migratory corridors, OWEB can help ensure our natural systems are healthy and decrease the impact of climate change on Oregon's fish and wildlife species.

OWEB's newly-adopted 2018 strategic plan is forward-thinking and establishes a vision based on watershed health and community engagement. **Priority 1 of the new plan is to build broad awareness of the relationship between people and watersheds.** At a time when Oregon's population is growing rapidly, it is important to connect people to their local watersheds. Doing so will help sustain our public investment in natural areas, rivers and healthy ecosystems.

**COLT supports the Governor's Recommended Budget for OWEB and also the Recommended Policy Package 110 for personal services contracting.** The land acquisition grant program requires an extra set of expertise that relies on contracted services. This policy package gives OWEB the ability to continue to work with transaction specialists that support long-lasting land conservation in Oregon.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We urge your strong support for the full budget proposal before you today.

Sincerely,



Kelley Beamer, executive director, COLT